Leaving no one behind in local 'governance by goals'

Note for our discussant - COVID-19 related duties and changes prevented us from submitting a full paper. We apologise for this. With the permission of the organisers, we've submitted a substantive summary of the paper instead.

(1) Introduction:

This paper examines how the SDG principle of 'leave no one behind' has been, and should be, reflected in city-level review and reporting of the SDGs.

Cities and the SDGs:

- The SDGs envision an extensive role for cities in implementation and review of Goal 11 and beyond; cities, networks, other local actors steered, orchestrated, monitored as part of 'goals-based governance'
- In turn, cities have responded to the SDGs - action on SDGs allows cities to appear progressive, global oriented, independent actors.
- SDG-oriented reporting and review has been embraced by cities (e.g. New York, Tokyo, London), and networks concerned with city SDG implementation (OECD, SDSN activity; ICLEI, Local2030) as part of this trend.

Leave no one behind:

- A crosscutting principle – manifested in some specific SDGs (e.g. 10) and targets, but also a general injunction; specifically meant to guide review processes "at all levels" (para 74).
- Could it receive more consideration in academic work on the SDGs? – limited consideration of this norm in governance by goals (Biermann et al 2017 p87); not taken into account in interlinkages work (ICSU etc.) or SDG projections.
- Yet central to universality and the relevance of agenda for developed countries; politically potent (see use by HR institutions, indigenous peoples, disabled people's organisations); found by countries and CSOs to be challenging (e.g. in partnerships, reviews)

How should cities (and city-oriented reporting projects) address the SDG principle to 'leave no one behind' in these reviews and reports?

(2) The principle of 'leave no one behind' and its significance for cities:

'Leave no one behind' in the 2030 Agenda:

Implementation:

"Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first" (preamble)

review:

"people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind"

"open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders."

data:

"disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts" (para 74)

As applied by the UN:

"LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, and their root causes. A major cause of people being left behind is persistent forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, which leaves individuals, families and whole communities marginalized, and excluded… LNOB compels us to focus on discrimination and inequalities (often multiple and intersecting) that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights. Many of the barriers people face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but rather the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people further and further behind."[1]

- Has a core focus – protected characteristics, plus geography – but can also encompass any dimension, or basis, of disadvantage or inequality. Individuals or groups can be left behind in civil/political and/or socioeconomic 'domains' of justice.
- geography as a basis of inequality connects 'leave no one behind' to a cosmopolitan account of global justice, and also connects 'leave no one behind' to the *spatial dimension* of justice in cities.
- Leave no one behind's core reinforcement of justice for the worst off and for people with characteristics recognised as focuses for equality clearly speaks to concerns of equity and diversity – connecting to egalitarianism and human rights, and so to *rights and theories of distributive justice for cities*.
- Leave no one behind in participation speaks to global deliberative democracy and the 'all affected' principle (making the case for marginalised groups and their advocates), but also *democracy and inclusive decision-making* in cities
- Leave no one behind applies not just across the social, but also the environmental agenda of the SDGs – connecting to environmental justice globally and in cities
- So, 'Leave no one behind' connects the SDGs to accounts of justice in cities, where these are concerned with socio-economic, civil-political, and environmental justice. Just as Leave No-one Behind can be mapped against, say, Nancy Fraser's account of global justice, through addressing redistribution, recognition and representation (Fraser, 2008), so it can be mapped against Fainstein's account of the just city as one of equity, diversity and democracy (Fainstein, 2010) or Davoudi et al's four elements of environmental, spatial, social justice and participation (Davoudi et al, 2016). We make only a relatively weak and easily defended claim here, just that 'leave no one behind' could be a way to channel and express these concerns.

[1] UN sustainable development group - https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind)

- As a principle or norm, 'leave no one behind' is not without problems and difficulties, but it is potentially worth exploring, defending, and applying.
- People are rarely (never?) 'left behind' by accident; deep structural causes contribute to the importance of this principle, but also sharpen the difficulty of this challenge – perhaps at city scale as much as at national or global levels.

(3) Summary, brief critique of current reporting around cities and SDGs

We consider, briefly, two kinds of city review:

(i)Comparative analyses/indices:

- SDSN and OECD have introduced indices that aim to compare a broad swath of cities
- Both rely on a narrow set of indicators from national set, with choices made based on coverage, relevance
- SDSN acknowledges challenge of poor data coverage for 'leave no one behind' (p45), but makes no wider effort to integrate the principle
- The weighting of 'leave no one behind'-oriented data in an index might be one way to reflect significance that bears further consideration. This appears problematic in the SDSN US case: e.g. SDSN US Cities index has San Francisco/Bay Area ranked first despite sixth highest level of income inequality in US
- OECD makes no acknowledgement of the principle of 'Leave Noone Behind' at all in its 'Territorial Approach to the SDGs' indicator set.
- In the SDSN and OECD reports, the focus for measures of inequality is largely on SDG10, or other explicitly poverty-related goals (ignoring cross-cutting, underpinning element)

(ii) Reviews and reports by individual cities: 'Voluntary Local Reviews'

Several cities have carried out Local Voluntary Reviews (echoing the Voluntary National Reviews mandated by the SDG framework). These have recently coalesced into a movement for VLRs.

- VLRs vary across two dimensions:
  - The number of goals engaged with
    - Some cities choose a subset of SDGs to focus on, usually 4-5 (NYC, Helsinki), while others attempt to engage with all or most of the SDGs (Bristol, LA)
  - Tendency towards self-reflection or boosterism
    - Some cities highlight both strengths and weaknesses, using the indicators to show where it could make improvements as well where it is achieving well (Helsinki); while others use it to highlight the city's policies and plans (LA)
- Many VLRs mention the LNOB principle, but do not engage with the concept thoroughly
  - For example, Mannheim's VLR simply declares that "In Mannheim, no one is left behind". NYC's VLR dedicates just over a page to a section on LNOB, but this is mostly to point out some very general challenges that NYC faces, such as the wear and tear on the subway system.
  - Bristol's VLR points out the challenges of engaging with LNOB at the city level when there is so little disaggregated data available to view differences

(4) How to 'leave no one behind' in city review: a realistic-ideal model

We offer a four-part approach to address the understanding of 'Leave no one behind' outlined in section 2. It addresses the 'core' of established dimensions of inequality through disaggregated data, but also aims to be sensitive to a greater diversity in the forms that disadvantage and marginalisation can take, and be active in seeking insight into marginalisation, via selecting indicators to recognise marginalised groups and addressing qualitative as well as quantitative research. Lastly, it seeks to use the review process itself to address concerns around participatory processes and civil/political inclusion in cities.

We present these four elements below. These are independent and complementary, and the ordering does not represent a ranking.

(i)extensive disaggregation, including spatial

- disaggregation of data by known dimensions of inequality and disadvantage illuminates standard 'protected characteristics'; can cover geography, at least to a certain level.
- *But* doesn't find what we're not already disaggregating on; misses those invisible in official statistics; less reliable as we examine informal or illicit activities

(ii)orienting indicator selection to highlight disadvantage

- Indicator selection, and the 'dashboards' and 'indices' produced are poised between technical and political considerations (as discussed in Pineo et al, 2018).
- Specific SDG targets (and indicators) call out specific marginalised, vulnerable groups – there is, in effect, a set of 'Leave no one behind' targets that cities could include to highlight some invisible, informal, illicit activities and groups

(iii) *supplementing with qualitative data*

- to address statistically-invisible left-behind groups and give better insight into the nature and experience of marginalisation and disadvantage

(iv*) participation and voice for these groups and their representatives in the review process*

- seeking a role for marginalised groups and their representatives in decisions around (i)-(iii); in presentation of data and observations; in the discussion over gaps, challenges, and responses that should follow
- recognising that exclusion from meaningful deliberation and decision-making is itself constitutive of marginalisation; that voice is important in the research under (iii)
- n.b. a given that (i)-(iii) includes, reflects on, inequalities in political participation
- Ulbirich et al (2019) advocate for this, focusing on the possible effects as seen through SDG11

Without further deep analysis, it seems reasonably clear that existing city reports and indices do not reflect these 4 elements.

(5) Challenges

Each of the components, though, face challenges in practice. We briefly report the key challenges from our current work on UK cities. These challenges, in part, might explain why current city reports and indices fall short; they are also an acknowledgement and reflection that this isn't easy in practice, and an agenda for things to be addressed in future work.

for (i):

- two kinds of disaggregation: sub-city geographical units and different social grouping combined data availability for both
- is the data regularly disaggregated in this way, such that it is accessible to non-GIS experts?
- challenges in accessible presentation of simultaneously demographic/spatial disadvantage?

for (ii):

- small-n data problems at city level
- skewed and underreporting of certain kinds of problems (human trafficking, FGM) inevitable
- pragmatic considerations about length of indicator lists and what's desired for a 'dashboard' approach

for (iii):

- New research and/or bringing academic research to bear – which is expensive and requires a way to steer researchers towards it
- Takes commitment over time
- This is difficult, and ethically difficult research
- Enabled by a 'science-policy interface' more receptive to different qualitative methodologies – what would need to change about the role of science and social science in the SDGs?

For (iv):

- city administrations could be wary around sacrificing political control over review
- Getting marginalised, vulnerable groups and representatives to engage; challenge of using SDG language in a context of limited awareness
- Representation, accountability in civil society a problem; the gap between organised civil society and citizenry

Some fundamental challenges at the city level?

- Budgetary and political constraints
- limits to devolved powers
- cities own self-perceptions and perceived priorities

(6) Conclusion

- 'Leaving no one behind' in cities that we know are characterised by injustice could support and advance justice
- City reviews and indices, could do better, therefore they *should* do better – new guidelines for VLRs, reflection on critiques, city dialogues around indices and VLRs
- More reflection needed on how to address these challenges in city contexts